



# Criminal Justice Knowledge Bank

An initiative of the Division of Criminal Justice Services



## Binghamton Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Task Force

### Practitioner:

[Binghamton Police Department](#)

**David Bidwell**

Captain

(607) 772-7093

[drbidwell@cityofbinghamton.gov](mailto:drbidwell@cityofbinghamton.gov)

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### Summary:

Binghamton addresses high crime rates within specific locations by implementing a collaborative approach using Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).

### Problem

In 2014, the Binghamton Police Department recognized that different neighborhoods throughout the city had significant criminal activity, including violent assaults, prostitution, sale and use of narcotics, burglaries, and robberies. Local officials analyzed data related to calls for service in these locations and found many calls linked to poorly maintained properties, including abandoned houses, overgrown foliage, poor overall surveillance, vacant lots, absentee landlords, and inadequate lighting. Binghamton utilized a [Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design](#) (CPTED) approach, which emphasizes proper design and effective use of buildings and public spaces to reduce fear and crime and improve quality of life.

### Program Description

CPTED is a multi-disciplinary approach that works within established systems and with existing resources to identify problem locations, evaluate the physical environment, and identify strategies that will remove or reduce opportunities for crime. CPTED is based on four principles:

1. Territoriality: physical improvements, alterations, or additions to neighborhoods that encourage ownership
2. Natural Surveillance: addition of lighting fixtures and clear lines of sight to improve visibility and increase the

perceived risk of being caught committing a crime (i.e., to see and be seen)

3. Access control: placement of signs, fencing, landscaping, and lighting reduces the opportunity for criminal activity, denying access and increasing an individual's perceived risk of being caught
4. Maintenance: residents and business owners keep their neighborhood well-maintained, which shows the area is cared for and destruction of the space will not be tolerated

CPTED fosters collaborative partnerships among government, educational institutions, social service agencies, and residents and business owners to identify alterations to physical environments, which can lead to the deterrence of criminal activity.

Binghamton created a CPTED Task Force composed of 15 police officers and employees of city agencies. Each member plays a unique and important role in enhancing public safety. The officers on the Task Force voluntarily attend a 24-hour CPTED training offered by the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).

Each CPTED project progresses through a CPTED workup. The Task Force identifies the problematic location, conducts site visits, and develops and presents the workup plan. Task Force members then review

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recommendations with the property owner or community members, present the workup plan at monthly Task Force meetings, request assistance from local agencies, if necessary, and conduct follow-up site visits as needed. During the pre-planning phase, Task Force members identify target locations based on multiple calls for service or complaints or observing quality-of-life issues at the location. Images retrieved from Google Maps' satellite view and drones help pinpoint problematic areas across the city. Two to three police officers are assigned to the location's Task Force team, based on their familiarity with the location and/or their rapport with the property owners.

After identifying a CPTED location, Task Force members conduct unscheduled site visits. If the location is residential, two officers conduct one site visit to limit interruptions. If the location is a commercial or community property, such as a church or school, Task Force officers conduct both daytime and nighttime site visits to identify conditions, such as poor lighting, that may facilitate criminal activity. Task Force officers are in uniform during these visits and seek to engage with community members. Officers photograph the property and interview business owners, employees, and residents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issues affecting the CPTED location. Once completed, officers review their initial findings and provide next steps to the property owner or manager. If the property owner or manager is not available during the site visit, officers try to speak with someone responsible for maintaining the property.

Once the visit(s) is complete, CPTED Task Force members collaboratively create a work-up plan addressing the issues identified at the location. Work-up plans are PowerPoint presentations that define and describe CPTED principles and the goals of the Task Force and introduce the team members.

The workup plan then assesses how the space is used versus how it was designed to be used. Members evaluate the level of appropriateness using the 3-D approach: designation, definition, and design. The 3-D approach acts as a guide, helping members determine (1) the purpose of the designated space, (2) the social, cultural, legal, or physical definitions that describe desired and acceptable behaviors within the space, such as signage or posted rules, and (3) if the space supports the desired behaviors. The assessment includes photographs and both positive and negative feedback, which is provided to the property owners. This approach encourages a more positive experience and is not strictly punitive.

The work-up plan then offers property owners and community members recommendations for affordable solutions to the issues observed. The plan also outlines a timeframe within which property owners are expected to

address the concerns. If the recommendations provided to property owners can be easily implemented, the Binghamton Police Department requests assistance from the city departments involved in the Task Force, such as assistance with clean up from public works. If the property owner is uncooperative, or the issue cannot be easily remedied, Binghamton Police Department requests that the local code, zoning, and fire departments issue violations. Task Force officers conduct follow-up visits to support the relationship between property owners and law enforcement and to encourage them to follow the recommendations. During both initial and follow-up site visits, officers are mindful to be approachable, honest, and professional, and not disrupt the normal routine of local businesses.

Following the completion of the workup plan, the Task Force officers will present the full plan to the property owner, individuals who had complaints about the location, and/or community stakeholders. Officers encourage attendees to share ideas on how to reduce opportunities for crime in the location and to fully discuss their findings and recommendations.

On a monthly basis, CPTED Task Force members from all involved agencies discuss active and recently resolved work-up plans. They also may submit ideas for continuous crime prevention and suggest locations for future consideration. Monthly CPTED meetings are open to the public, and local leaders encourage members of the community to attend so they can gain a better understanding of how the principles of CPTED can be applied to identified locations around the city.

As of June 2023, the Binghamton CPTED Task Force completed plans for more than 200 locations.

## Funding

The Binghamton Police Department uses funding from the state's Gun Involved Violence Elimination (GIVE) initiative, as needed, to pay for overtime worked by officers assigned to the Task Force. The police department is one of 28 that participate in GIVE, which is administered by the state Division of Criminal Justice Services.

## Relevant Partnerships

Members of Binghamton's CPTED Task Force include Southern Tier Crime Analysis Center, the City of Binghamton's: [Police Department Community Response Team](#), [Fire Department](#), [Mayor's Office](#), [Corporate Counsel](#), [Code Enforcement](#), [Planning, Zoning & Historic Preservation Department](#) and [Department of Public Works](#)

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## Supportive Research

[Research](#) supports the idea that crime is specific and situational, and it emphasizes the importance of natural surveillance in creating safe neighborhoods. Individuals can be opportunistic and commit crimes in places they know well. Opportunity arises out of daily routines and activities, and places with crime are often also places without observers or capable guardians. The broad nature of the CPTED approach applies to any setting. Binghamton Police Department based their CPTED strategy on the successful efforts in crime reduction projects recognized in [SafeGrowth - Creating Safety & Sustainability through Community Building and Urban Design](#). SafeGrowth outlines a model based on the principles of CPTED for effective safety planning tailored to neighborhood strengths for a safer community.

## Critical Success Factors

- All stakeholders must understand the four guiding principles of CPTED and their roles within the Task Force. Developing knowledge of the CPTED model increases program support and engagement and bolsters agency participation across the city.
- Law enforcement and non-law enforcement stakeholder involvement are equally important. Collaborative efforts offer a wide range of expertise beyond the scope of law enforcement when problem-solving. In doing so, the Binghamton Police Department has partnered with other city agencies and Broome County agencies to increase buy-in and support of the approach.
- Open lines of communication between property owners and members of the CPTED Task Force is essential. Each CPTED location is distinctive. Collaboration among the community, Task Force members, and local officials is crucial for lasting changes.
- The Task Force should be professionally diverse. Members with various expertise allow for other types of sanctions, which can be more effective than relying solely on the presence of law enforcement officials in the area.

## Lessons Learned

- Dedicate staff time for CPTED involvement. While additional, limited funding may be available, CPTED Task force members conduct their duties during their designated scheduled shifts. CPTED-trained officers scheduled during the evening shift may conduct a nighttime site visit, while daytime officers conduct them

during the day to ensure a balance of responsibilities. By assigning distinctive duties to each shift, the Task Force gains a comprehensive understanding of site needs.

- Invite community members to routine CPTED meetings. The police department found when community leaders and other interested parties attend the CPTED monthly meetings, they eagerly support the possibilities this program creates for their community.
- Be transparent in CPTED strategies and recommendations. Community leaders may be unsure how to begin the process and receive CPTED assistance. Communicating what CPTED is and how to best utilize it improves community partnerships.

## Additional Comments

- In 2022, Binghamton's mayor announced a \$1 million investment through the [American Recovery Plan Act \(ARPA\)](#) for public safety programs within the city. ARPA funding seeks to build and rehabilitate communities following the surge in violence during the COVID-19 pandemic. If property owners implement the recommendations presented by the Task Force, city officials offer grants through ARPA that reimburse property and small business owners a percentage of the costs associated with improving their properties.
- In 2023, DCJS contracted with the Binghamton Police Department to administer advanced CPTED training to agencies across New York State. DCJS routinely sends announcements to law enforcement agencies across the state, notifying them of any upcoming trainings and how to register. Local police agencies are encouraged to attend.
- The principles of CPTED have been uniquely adapted to improve the quality of residential properties, schools, and places of worship. The Binghamton Police Department also consults with local schools and churches to incorporate CPTED techniques into their project plans when applying for funding opportunities.
- Trained CPTED officers from the Binghamton Police Department assist interested agencies with implementing CPTED principles within their jurisdiction. A similar process is followed with trained officers who help city officials create mockups or conduct site visits to start the process. Binghamton CPTED officers can provide technical assistance when requested.

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